

FROM THE BOOKSHELF NO. 130  
JOHN ALBERT

MARCH 2, 1976

"THE RUSSIANS" BY HEDRICK SMITH

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES ... FROM THE BOOKSHELF...A SERIES IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY, JOHN ALBERT'S REPORT ON "THE RUSSIANS" BY HEDRICK SMITH, PUBLISHED BY QUANRANGLE, THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK COMPANY. HERE IS BOOK EDITOR \_\_\_\_\_.

EDITOR: THE RUSSIANS, WRITTEN BY HEDRICK SMITH, MOSCOW BUREAU CHIEF FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES FOR THREE YEARS, IS NOT A THEORETICAL WORK ABOUT THE SOVIET STATE OR SOVIET POLICIES. IT IS A PRAGMATIC ATTEMPT TO DESCRIBE LIFE IN THE SOVIET UNION AS IT APPEARS TO AN OUTSIDER. SMITH SPEAKS RUSSIAN, HIS CHILDREN ATTENDED SOVIET SCHOOLS, AND THE ENTIRE FAMILY TRAVELED FREELY, AND MINGLED WITH SOVIET CITIZENS OF ALL WALKS OF LIFE, AS MUCH AS SOVIET RULES AND REGULATIONS WOULD PERMIT.

D  
P  
T

HEDRICK SMITH SAYS HIS PURPOSE WAS "TO CONVEY TO READERS WHAT WAS THE HUMAN QUOTIENT, THE TEXTURE AND FABRIC OF THE PERSONAL LIVES OF THE RUSSIANS AS PEOPLE....TO LISTEN TO THEM TELL HOW THEY SEE THE OUTSIDE WORLD AND WHAT RUSSIA MEANS TO THEM."

SMITH WAS IMPRESSED BY WHAT HE CALLS THE CLASS-CHARACTER OF SOVIET SOCIETY, THE IMMENSE PRIVILEGES FOR THE PARTY AND STATE HIERARCHY AND, TO A LESSER EXTENT, THOSE IN THE ARTISTIC AND SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH THE SYSTEM. HE PUTS IT THIS WAY:

VOICE: "THE SYSTEM HAS INSTITUTIONALIZED A DOUBLE STANDARD IN LIFE-STYLES FOR THE ELITE AND FOR THE MASSES, WITH SOME SHADINGS IN BETWEEN FOR SOME OF THE PEOPLE PART WAY UP. AND THE ELITE TAKE THESE ADVANTAGES FOR GRANTED WITH AN ARROGANT DISDAIN FOR THE COMMON MAN THAT OFTEN SURPASSES THE HAUGHTIEST RICH OF THE WEST."

EDITOR: THE AUTHOR PROBES DEEPLY INTO THE MINDS AND SOULS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE. HE NOTES HOW DIFFERENT THE SOVIET EDUCATION SYSTEM IS FROM THAT OF THE WEST -- WITH ITS HEAVY EMPHASIS ON TECHNICAL SKILLS RATHER THAN TEACHING HOW TO THINK AND TO DEVELOP SELF-EXPRESSION. SMITH SEES NO REBELLION AGAINST THE ELDERS, EVEN THOUGH SOVIET YOUNGSTERS LISTEN TO ROCK MUSIC AND WEAR WESTERN JEANS. BY WORLD STANDARDS, HE SAYS, SOVIET YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ABNORMALLY QUIESCENT. WHAT THEY WANT IS AFFLUENCE AND THE GOOD LIFE. AND THEY ARE NOT REBELLING AGAINST THE LARGER SOCIETY AS IN THE WEST. BUT AT THE SAME TIME THEIR LACK OF IDEOLOGY AND THEIR MATERIALISM WORRIES THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE OLDER GENERATION.

THE AUTHOR HAS A SPECIAL CHAPTER ON SOVIET WOMEN. HE FINDS THEM MORE OR LESS RESIGNED TO WORKING TO SUPPLEMENT THE FAMILY INCOME. BUT THE GREATEST TRAGEDY FOR SOVIET URBAN WOMEN, HEDRICK SMITH FINDS, IS THAT THEY FEEL FORCED BY CIRCUMSTANCES TO LIMIT FAMILIES TO ONE CHILD. AND HE FINDS THAT MANY WOMEN COMPLAIN OF DISCRIMINATION JUST AS VEHEMENTLY AS WESTERN WOMEN.

EDITOR: HEDRICK SMITH SEES A SOVIET SYSTEM OF CONTROL MUCH MORE  
(CONT'D) REFINED THAN WHAT WENT ON UNDER STALIN. CONFORMITY IS  
ACHIEVED, HE WRITES, THROUGH THE SIMPLE DEVICE OF MAKING  
ACCESS TO HIGHER LEARNING, GOOD JOBS AND CONSUMER  
PRIVILEGES, INCLUDING POSSESSION OF A CAR, DEPENDENT ON  
BEHAVIOR. ACCESS TO SPECIAL STORES, TRIPS ABROAD, BETTER  
APARTMENTS: ALL THESE ARE PRIVILEGES BESTOWED ONLY ON  
CONFORMISTS. HE WRITES:

VOICE: "SOVIETS PRIVATELY GROUSE ABOUT THEIR LIVING  
CONDITIONS, COMPLAIN ABOUT CORRUPTION, MOCK THE PRETENSES  
OF THEIR IDEOLOGY, AND PRIVATELY JOKE ABOUT THEIR  
LEADERS, BUT THEY ACCEPT THE SYSTEM AS FUNDAMENTALLY  
SOUND, AS PARADOXICAL AS THAT MAY SEEM. MOREOVER,  
CONTRARY TO WHAT MANY PEOPLE THINK IN THE WEST, THE  
SOVIET PRESS DOES OFFER A SAFETY VALVE FOR MINOR  
GRASS-ROOTS DISSATISFACTION--LETTERS TO THE EDITOR."

EDITOR: SMITH NOTES GREAT PRIDE IN SOVIET ACHIEVEMENTS, A STRONG  
FEELING OF NATIONALISM, BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, A DEEP-SET  
NATIONAL SENSE OF INFERIORITY TOWARD THE WEST IN FIELDS  
OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND COMMERCE, AS WELL AS THE  
AMENITIES OF DAILY LIFE. HOWEVER, "A DEEP AND TENACIOUS  
LOVE OF COUNTRY" IS SEEN AS THE MOST POWERFUL UNIFYING  
FORCE IN THE SOVIET UNION.

MUCH OF THE BOOK IS FILLED WITH IMPRESSIONS OF SMITH'S  
TRAVELS, LONG TALKS WITH SOVIET PEOPLE IN ALL WALKS OF  
LIFE, FROM FAITHFUL PARTY MEMBERS TO DISSIDENTS. HE  
LIKED THE PEOPLE AND ENJOYED THEIR COMPANY. AND HE

EDITOR:  
(CONT'D)

DEVOTES MUCH SPACE TO THE IMPERFECTIONS OF THE SOVIET CONSUMER ECONOMY, THE CORRUPTION, THE PLANNING INEFFICIENCY. BUT HE IS TREMENDOUSLY IMPRESSED BY THE WAY THE PEOPLE BEAT THE SYSTEM. "THE RUSSIAN TACTIC," SAYS THE AUTHOR, "IS NOT TO CONFRONT AUTHORITY, NOT TO SEEK REFORM OF THE SYSTEM, BUT TO STEP BACK, ENDURE, AND LOOK FOR LOOPHOLES OR PRAY THAT SOMEONE ELSE'S INEFFICIENCY WILL SOMEHOW HELP YOU TO GET BY."

SMITH HAD PLENTY OF CONTACTS WITH DISSIDENTS, NOT ONLY SOLZHENITSYN AND SAKHAROV, BUT OTHERS LESS WELL-KNOWN. BUT HE SEES THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT AS FRAGMENTED AND POWERLESS. HE SAYS THAT SINCE THE EAST-WEST AGREEMENTS IN HELSINKI THE DISSIDENTS HAVE BEEN DEALT WITH EVEN MORE SEVERELY AND HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED OF THEIR MOST EFFECTIVE SPOKESMEN.

SMITH OFFERS VERY LITTLE HOPE FOR A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE FROM BELOW IN THE SOVIET SYSTEM. MAJOR CHANGES, HE MAINTAINS, HAVE COME ONLY THROUGH DECISIONS FROM ON HIGH. AND THE KREMLIN, HE BELIEVES, HAS PROVEN ITSELF REMARKABLY ADEPT AT INSULATING ITS POPULATION FROM THE CONTAGION OF FREE IDEAS FROM THE WEST. THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF THE SOVIET PEOPLE, HEDRICK SMITH BELIEVES, FIND COMFORT IN THE STABILITY AND ORDER THE SYSTEM PROVIDES. HE WRITES OF APPREHENSION ABOUT WHAT TO THEM SEEMS CHAOTIC TURBULENCE IN WESTERN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES AND SAYS THAT MOST OF THEM DO NOT WANT DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA.

EDITOR: SMITH DOES NOT BELIEVE IN THE NEW SOVIET MAN, CREATED BY  
(CONT'D) SOCIALIST SOCIETY. ON THE CONTRARY, HE SAYS, THE RUSSIAN  
CHARACTER HAS CHANGED LITTLE. HE SEES BREZHNEV'S TACTICS  
TODAY ONLY SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE CZARS AND  
HIS STRATEGY AS MUCH THE SAME: TO EXTRACT THE BEST  
TECHNOLOGY FROM THE WEST WITHOUT HAVING TO ABSORB THE  
CRITICAL CAST OF MIND OR THE WAY OF LIFE THAT PRODUCED  
THOSE ADVANCES. "AS DID THE CZARS BEFORE HIM," SMITH  
CONCLUDES, "BREZHNEV TAKES A RISK. BUT SO FAR THERE IS  
NO VISIBLE SIGN TO EXPECT THAT THE ANCIENT PATTERNS OF  
RUSSIAN LIFE WILL BE FUNDAMENTALLY ALTERED."

ANNCR: YOU HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF AMERICA WEEKLY  
PROGRAM, FROM THE BOOKSHELF, IN WHICH WE REPORT ON  
BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY'S SELECTION WAS  
THE RUSSIANS BY HEDRICK SMITH. JOIN US AGAIN NEXT  
WEEK...(AT THIS TIME) FOR ANOTHER SELECTION FROM THE  
BOOKSHELF. THIS IS \_\_\_\_\_.

-0-

WJL/RTD